

THE FORKS

**THEN - NOW - AND - IN - THE -
FUTURE**

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Recreational Geography

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- Forks appeals to all senses - smell, taste, touch, sound, sight
- learning styles - reading, doing, creating.
- historic area "not" just historic site
- alive thru time → history is capturing not all exposed.

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INTRODUCTION

The Red River Corridor is an area extending along the Red River from the Sale River south of Winnipeg to Netley Marsh at Lake Winnipeg. One of the first new Parks Canada programs was developed in 1978 when Canada and Manitoba signed the Agreement for Recreation and Conservation (ARC) focusing on historical, natural and recreational resources in the Red River Corridor. (Refer to Map 1.)

Specific projects were coordinated with help from public and private organizations as well as individuals. Nine public meetings were held which influenced the proposals. In 1981 the master plan received approval from the federal and provincial ministries.

The resources of the Red River Corridor are vast. The range includes development of historic and nature interpretive centres; riverbank parks; recreational activities; waterfowl hunting and fishing.

The most important and significant site in the Red River Corridor is The Forks. Thirteen million dollars was set aside for river-related projects in Winnipeg and redevelopment near The Forks.

This paper focuses on The Forks and its redevelopment as a "special place" for Winnipeg and Manitoba. The Red River of the North and adjacent Assiniboine play a crucial role in the significance of this "special place" and therefore will be commented on from the historic and transportation systems to present day recreational facilities.

The recreational, historical and cultural significance of the site will be emphasized. An analysis of The Forks in reference to Richard Butler's (1980) evolution on the rise and decline of tourist resorts, will be discussed to foresee the future of The Forks. As a meeting place for centuries, The Forks will be considered as a continuous growing and thriving area. These dynamics will continue for many years to come due to the nature of the site, redevelopment of the area, and public input into the planning.

THE RED RIVER OF THE NORTH

The Red River of the North flows through the northern United States (specifically North Dakota and Minnesota) and southern Manitoba emptying into Lake Winnipeg. The river is 545 miles in length. The silty loam that accumulated as a result of the former Lake Agassiz glacier is now one of North America's most fertile farming regions. The Red River was named after the reddish-brown silt it carries.

These murky waters of the northbound Red River join the quieter eastbound Assiniboine at a meeting place called "The Forks". In the heart of downtown Winnipeg, located behind the Union Station and formally the C.N. East Yards people are congregating at a traditional "meeting place". For over 6,000 years The Forks has been the home for historic Fort Rouge, Fort Gibraltar and Upper Fort Garry. Indians, Metis fur traders and European immigrants went to The Forks to do the same things tourists are doing at The Forks today. They went there to meet, trade, create, work, fish and hunt. Although now people are fishing and hunting for bargains and not wild game. People use The Forks and waterways for recreation, leisure, shopping, as well as historical, commercial and cultural events.

TRANSPORTATION

The river was a major transportation link between Lake Winnipeg and the Mississippi River System. Locks near the mouth of the river enabled ships to navigate to major cities such as Winnipeg, Grand Forks and Fargo (North Dakota).

Initially travel by foot overland and by canoe on the waterways were the first means of transportation. In the early 19th century, the larger York boats replaced canoes to transport furs, supplies and machinery to the Hudson Bay coast and Red River Settlement. Steamers replaced the York boats in June 1859. The first steamboat Anson Northrup arrived at The Forks and St. Boniface after a four day journey from Minnesota. It was the first of many riverboats to navigate the Red River. Thousands of immigrants came from the south to settle in Manitoba. These boats returned with grain for sale in the United States.

Eventually the steamboats were replaced by the railways. In October 1877 "The Countess of Dufferin" railway engine arrived on a barge pushed by the steamboat "Selkirk". Marilyn Edmunds states, "The coming of rail transportation marked the end of The Forks at the port of immigration, trade and commerce. It also marked the end of the steamboat era. The trip to St. Paul that used to take nine days by steamer now only took one by rail." (Currents A View from The Forks)

In the beginning of the 20th century several steamers still operated as pleasure boats and ferries. The Kenora steamer was taken out in 1965 ending a century of steamboat use. With development of the rail facilities at this historic site public access and use was virtually cut off. The Forks is "one of the most important

properties in Western Canada and perhaps North America" (Harper 9).

THE FORKS RENEWAL CORPORATION

This special place could not be forgotten and because of its significance The Forks Renewal Corporation was established on July 29, 1987 by the municipal, provincial and federal governments. The mandate was to redevelop the major riverfront site at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and to coordinate the redevelopment of the East Yard area. The Forks is presently 96 acres. Fifty-six acres is owned and being redeveloped by The Forks Renewal Corporation; 15 acres is owned by Parks Canada and approximately 25 acres is owned by the City of Winnipeg. Consultation for initial proposals for development included community groups, developers, and individual members of the public. The Forks Renewal Corporation is made up of a ten member Board of Directors who report to the three governments. N.W. (Nick) Diakiw is The Forks Corporation President and Chief Executive Officer and Marilyn Edmunds is the Communications Manager for the Corporation. The Corporation developed the Phase 1 Concept and Financial Plan. It concluded that The Forks should be "a meeting place" - "a special and distinct all-season gathering and recreational place at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers" (Harper 9).

RECREATION AND LEISURE DEVELOPMENT

There are many opportunities for recreational use at The Forks and adjacent riverbanks and waterways. Some leisure enjoyment opportunities includes physical recreation, relaxation, contemplation, socialization, historical, cultural, interpretative and educational centres.

The riverside walkways begin on the west bank of the Red and continue along the north bank of the Assiniboine. This is a beautiful picturesque and increasingly popular site. Walk along the tranquil riverbank and look up above the scrub oaks and downtown skyline to see the vast prairie sky. Historic St. Boniface on the opposite riverbank is also a spectacular view from the walkways.

The riverbank has been referred to as "lovers lane", a place to stroll casually hand-in-hand with your sweetheart. Families with children can enjoy the walkways as there is still natural bush for a child's explorations. Hikers, cross-country skiers, cyclists and joggers find the walkways inviting. The Plaza is an open public space on the river. In summer the Plaza has fountains, canopied and open performance spaces for "Buskers" or travelling performers. There is also areas for patio dining and picnics. In winter the Plaza offers outdoor ice skating and access to the riverbank for tobogganing, skiing and skating. Horse and carriage rides are also available at The Forks and will tour historic St. Boniface and other downtown sites.

The Pavilion is an open building which offers refuge from the elements all year round. It provides a skate changing room in the winter - with a fire burning - and a meeting place in the summer for friends and families to gather.

/ Splash Dash - River Interg. Tours

The historic port is where small boats and canoes can moor free for an hour. Canoe and sailboat rentals are available as well as sailing lessons.

bike rentals (2023)

moved in 2001 or 02

The Lord Selkirk tours offer cruises from April to October on the Paddlewheel Queen and Paddlewheel Princess. River Rouge tours operate during the same summer season offering cruises in their diesel engine ships the M.S. River Rouge (400 passengers) and M.S. Lady Winnipeg (150 passengers).

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL

Canada Parks service owns and operates the nine acres on the river's edge. This acreage has historical significance as well as being recreational in its function.

The Wall Through Time is based on the history of The Forks and recent archaeological discoveries. A walk from the Plaza down to the riverside is a trip back through time. The trip takes the tourist through the great floods (1826 and 1950), battles, through the glories of the fur trade, and further back thousands of years when huge mammoths roamed the earth and were hunted at The Forks.

The Wall is made of rough limestone 82.4 meters long and 18.5 meters in height. The text is written in Cree, English and French. Plaques and markers at eye level give information through illustrations, anecdotes, and artifacts.

Members of the Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen and local suppliers and contractors donated their time, equipment and materials necessary to complete The Wall Through Time.

The floods deposited a layer of silt and clay over remains left behind from people who had camped at the site over thousands of years ago. The first evidence of human activity was discovered during a sewer excavation in the fall of 1988. This discovery revealed that people lived at The Forks about 6,000 years ago.

Once unearthed, the archaeologists began to piece together Manitoba's history.

The Forks has the first Parks Canada Public Dig where everyone is welcome to participate. The summer programs offer opportunities for tourists to work alongside professional archaeologists in the scientific excavation of artifacts.

Another major drawing card to The Forks are the seasonal festivals, cultural, recreational and ethnic events. They include: The Winnipeg International Children's Festival, Festa Italiana, The Great Pumpkin Challenge, A Family Christmas at The Forks, First Night Celebrations (family fireworks at 5:00 p.m.) and Great Tomato Contest. Most recent celebrations include the Prairie Canada Bird Carving Competitions, Canada Day Activities, Scottish Festival, Canada Summer Games, Native Pow Wow, Caribbean Festival and Parade, Saturday Night Special Events and the Celebrations on "Raise the Flag", Saturday, September 26, 1992.

This variety of events brings individuals to The Forks who may not otherwise use the facilities. This continuous flow of people enhance the quality of the site and encourages ongoing traffic.

RESIDENTIAL

In the initial Phase 1 plan 500 - 1,000 residential units were conceived with a net density of 80 units per acre. This component has been deferred. The housing would be carefully and strategically looked at in terms of distinctive designs, access, impact and viability.

Hotel - "Inn at the Forks" - spa - June 2014

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INSTITUTIONAL AND SUPPORTIVE
COMMERCIAL

The objective of this development is to "focus on retail, recreation, cultural and commercial ventures on the non-riverbank portion of the property and use existing structures and buildings on the site where appropriate" (Harper 12).

The Forks Market opened October 5, 1989. Originally, the Stables Building for the C.N. rail yards. The 80 year old building was completely refurbished leaving much of the original brick and wood. Norm Hotson was the architect who also designed Granville Island and many Canadian open markets. The market includes 32,000 square feet of retail space and 11,000 square feet of office space. The market offers a variety of food vendors, seasonal stalls, restaurants and boutiques with speciality and handcrafted items. It is the most public market of its kind in Winnipeg.

A prominent feature of the market is the six-storey glass enclosed tower. The observation platform on the top level overlooks the entire Forks site, a magnificent view of historic surroundings.

THE FORKS AND ARC

In the Spring of 1989 the National Historical Site opened. It was federally funded and a portion of the ARC of the Red River Corridor Project. The ARC's contribution to The Forks consists of 14 - 15 acres of land, some which is still undeveloped and used for festivals. The National Historic Site has a series of pathways for walking. Along the paths are approximately eight interpretive nodes which show signs and pictures of historical events. The themes range from prehistoric time through native inhabitants to the fur trade immigrants and Red River Settlement. A granite wall termed the "meeting" place wall is in both official Canadian languages.

There is a circular stone building called the Orientation Node. A security office, open trailer for visitor information and public washrooms are available.

The playground is a valuable contribution to their commitment to family enjoyment. It represents the immigrants who came to this area and has a transportation theme. Children can play in a York Boat at a train station and place their heads on top of figure immigrants to image they are the people.

There are three categories for programs funded by ARC at The Forks. The first program is provided by Parks Service where Interpreters walk around to discuss the history with tourists. These Interpreters also take a count of the traffic visitation to the area. Due to the many points of entry it is difficult to count all visitors. The Interpreters collect visitation statistics by personal contact or attendance at the performances which are offered throughout the four month season. The average visitation is 60,000 people per annum. This fluctuates due to weather and festivals

(i.e.: Canada Summer Games).

Artists are hired under a contract with Parks Service to do a performance or presentation depicting the history of the site. The second program involves participants from large festivals who contribute to the historical significance of the area by way of performance. The Festival du Voyageur, Children's Festival, Scottish Heritage Day and Mother Earth's People (aboriginal day) are good examples of this program. Funding is provided for these large festivals. In the third program funding is not available, however, the Parks Services Interpreters work with the small events to encourage and incorporate historic meaning into their programs. For example, the Interpreters worked with the Boy Scouts to build and understand the historical significance of fire.

RICHARD BUTLER "HYPOTHETICAL CYCLE OF AREA EVOLUTION"

Richard Butler (1980) developed a theory on the rise and decline of resort areas.

Stage 1 is called the Exploration Stage. A small number of tourists are attracted to an area because of its natural and cultural/historical features. In 1989 The Forks had just been opened and the number of tourists were small by comparison to 1991.

Stage 2 is entering into the Involvement Stage. Advertising encourages a variety of people to come and see the area. The Market at The Forks enhanced the involvement at this point as did the "all-season" round open areas for recreational use.

The Development Stage (Stage 3) shows more advertising and an increased number of tourists. The marketing and promotion will reach to a further tourist market. Another advantage of The Forks is in the historical significance of the area and will attract tourists from both Canada and the United States.

The Children's Festival and Festa Italiana have relocated to The Forks. Everyone wants to be a part of the new "trendy" Forks. People are talking about it and consider it socially prestigious to be there.

Stage 4 is the Consolidation Stage and falls in the "Critical Range of Elements of Capacity". Very few changes will be made at this point. The growth and development stops. The rate of increase in numbers of visitors will decline. The area is economically dependent on tourism.

In Stage 5 the peak number of visitors will have been reached. The area will no longer be in fashion and there will be an abundance of empty hotels and restaurants. This is called the Stagnation Stage. A real crisis may occur as the economy of the area will by this point be very dependant on tourism. The resort area at this point needs to Rejuvenate, Stage 6, or they will see a serious Decline, Stage 7, in tourist population and the virtual death of the area.

In my opinion, The Forks is functioning between Stage 2 and Stage 3 with popularity ever increasing. In 1991 over five million people visited The Forks site. It is estimated that 50,000 people visit during the Winnipeg Children's Festival alone.

Leanne Roberts of Parks Services Canada, has statistics on people who attended events or were in contact with the Parks Canada, Historical Site Interpreters. In 1989, 36,690 people attended from the opening in April to December. In 1990, 194,778 people were counted. In 1991 there were 131,641 people and in 1992 there were 164,194 people counted ending in September, 1992.

There are many reasons why The Forks is a success and why I believe it will continue to grow and prosper.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPECTS

The future holds many exciting new projects and renovations of historical buildings.

The 101 year old B & B Building will be the new location for the Children's Museum. Formerly a rail car machine shop, the hands-on museum will assist the 3 to 13 year olds in enriching their educational and cultural resources.

It will teach them more about themselves and the world they live in. Lynda Isitt, the Founding Director of the Children's Museum believes that schools do not always address the development needs of every child and the Museum recognizes that many children have different learning styles and skills. Their approach is through music, body kinesthetics and play. Lynda Isitt states that in January 1993 construction will begin and they hope to move into the 24,000 square foot building in the Spring of 1994. This is an increase of space from the present 11,000 square feet. In Phase II, the completed Museum will have another 17,000 square feet of building with additional hands-on activities for children. They hold a 75 year lease with the City of Winnipeg. Lynda feels this is an ideal location for the Museum but also feels it is mutually beneficial as people will use The Forks and Museum simultaneously.

Renovations to the old Johnson Technical Warehouse building will create an 80 suite "Character" hotel. Robert K. Froese's company, the Penn-Co Group and The Forks Renewal Corporation recently announced a 10 million dollar redevelopment of the Johnson building. A German cultural centre will be adjacent to the hotel and will cost 3.5 million dollars. In 1816, Lord Selkirk set out from Montreal with many Germans from the Upper Rhine and Swiss soldiers. Today it is estimated that

192,000 Manitobans are of German speaking descent (German, Austrian, Swiss, Mennonite, and Hutterian, Brethren communities). "The cultural centre will provide space for arts, music, and other cultural activities in facilities including an auditorium, education centre, museum, archives and administration offices" (The Forks Renewal Corporation). The old Steam Plant will be refurbished into a rail heritage museum with displays and activities, educational and fun.

The old rail bridge will be re-deeded to allow pedestrian access to South Point (the island between the two rivers). At South Point an Aboriginal Centre will be built "a permanent and continuing celebration of our Native and Metis peoples" (The Forks Renewal Corporation).

There is also a Leisure Centre to be built with emphasis on health and wellness. An all-season, world-class indoor waterpark, gardens, recreational activities for families, seniors and those with alternative abilities. "The prominent themes for these facilities are integrated/inter-generational leisure, an aquatic anchor, winter green, wellness and 'all-children' play components" (Harper 11).

There was a great deal of research put into the planning and redevelopment of The Forks and the research continues. As Geoffrey Wall writes very few historic sites reach "international fame such as the pyramids . . . the majority of historic sites cater to a predominantly local or regional rather than an international clientele" (12). On the other hand, "Nozick and Simpson (1990) describe the site as a birthplace of all western North American exploration and settlements and the crossroads of Native North American and European cultures in the region" (Harper 9).

Tourists from near and far find The Forks entertaining, exciting and relaxing. Wall continues to discuss the advantages of an historic area as opposed to an historic site. The Forks is 96 acres of historic significance. The site, archaeologist, Sid Krocher indicates there is "over 90 acres of archaeological possibilities" indicating the whole of The Forks area has historic value.

The Forks is at an ideal location. Being in downtown Winnipeg visitors can arrive by car, bus or boat and parking is free. People walk, jog and hike to The Forks. Tourists will not generally go far out of their way to visit historic areas so this close location attracts all Winnipeggers and Manitobans. The benefits of the market and complimentary attractions increase the drawing power to The Forks. They will stay longer and spend money which in turn contributes to the local economy.

The second phase of The Forks Recreational Corporation redevelopment is beginning. The brochure presently distributed reads, "Be Part of the Process!" The Phase II Plan has the same mandate as the Phase I Plan. Community involvement in planning the future of The Forks is the Board of Directors commitment to ensure a successful and mixed use of the "meeting place".

Volunteers form an advisory "Citizen's Group" who participate in the planning process. Community organizations and individuals may submit written opinions and ideas which are received by the "Citizen's Group" working together with The Forks Advisory Committees and the Board. In a conference in October 1992 the basic Phase II Plan will be reviewed. In November 1992 a public response to the draft will be held. There is a review by the Board then the completed Phase II Plan will be forwarded to the three levels of Government in December 1992.

SUMMARY

Due to the ongoing development which will likely take another 20 - 25 years The Forks will be ever increasing in its atmosphere. Change will bring new people to the area and return visitors and to continue enhancing their life.

The public and community input into the majority of the area's redevelopment plans especially from The Forks Renewal Corporation Phase II Plan, guarantees that the desires of the people as far as their social, economical, recreational, cultural and historical needs will be met.

In conclusion **The Forks appeals to the senses**. As soon as you arrive at The Forks you will experience a beautifully landscaped environment, space, water and nature. It is aesthetically pleasing to the eye. History is everywhere. The old Johnson terminal still looms over the Pavilion and Plaza, ready for redevelopment. The Wall Through Time and National Historic Site are fabulous educational and recreational journeys through time.

People also seem to respect and appreciate the environment. There isn't any litter or garbage strewn about. The clean, fresh air, water and sunlight in a natural setting is very appealing.

It is still pleasant to hear the occasional train and boat go by as this was the main transportation centre for the west. Although being in downtown Winnipeg the traffic noise seems to be kept to a minimum. Most important is that the natural sounds can be heard; water lapping on the shoreline; birds singing in the trees; wind blowing

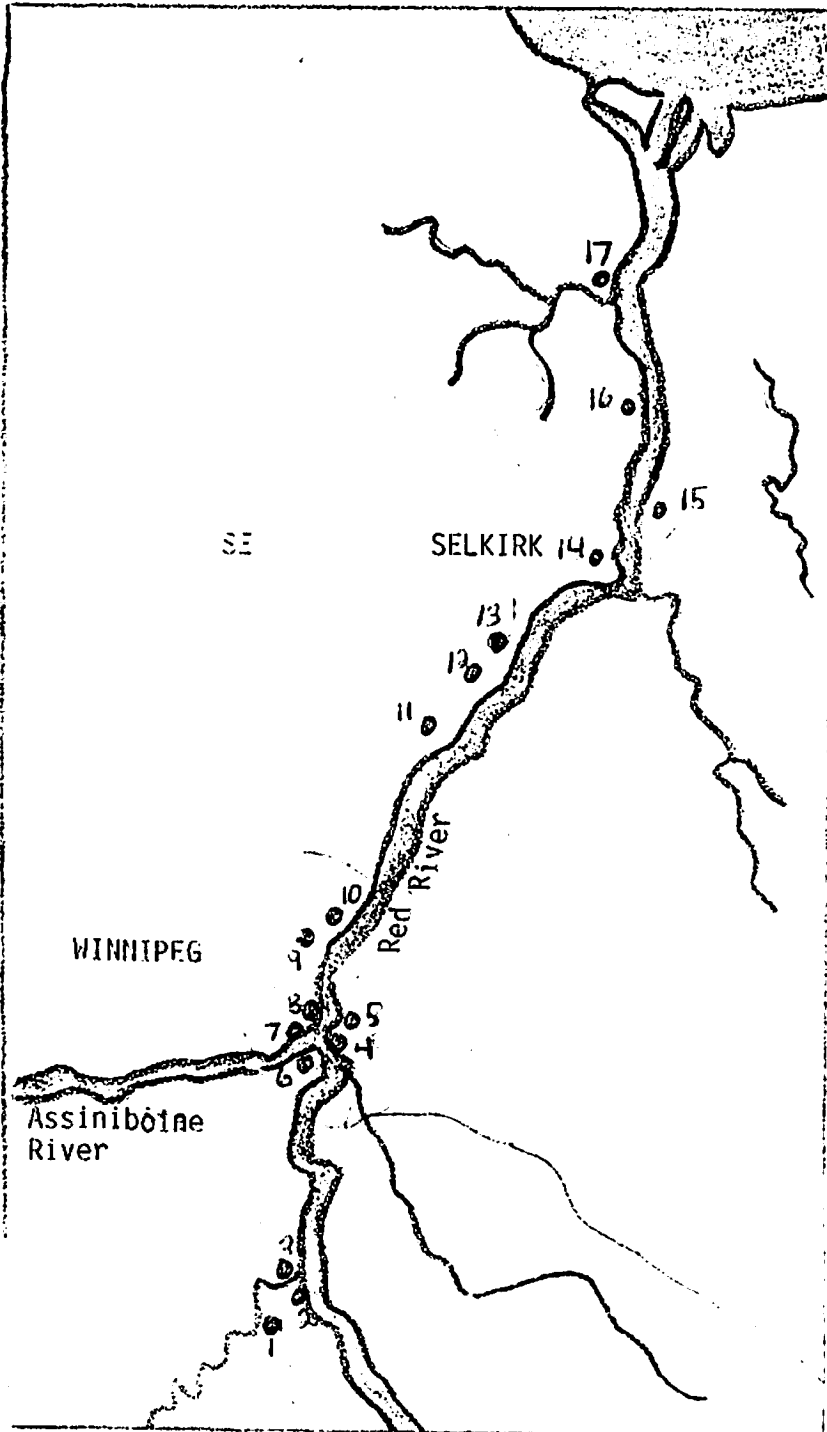
a gentle breeze. Sounds romantic doesn't it? The water has always had a calming affect on the human psyche.

The market atmosphere is also appealing. The sense of openness and high ceilings portrays the openness from the outside-inside. But the real appeal to the senses is the incredible smell as soon one walks into the market. Due to the variety of food for sale and the number of restaurants the smell is everywhere. If you own one of the shops in the market it appeals to your dollars and senses.

People come to The Forks because they like it. The Forks is a great spot to be. People will take in the programs and study the historical significance when they come to the area, however, they would not necessarily have planned to do that.

The area is a draw and it seems to be a place where people in any season, of all ages, ethnic, religious, social and economic background come to meet and enjoy the beauty and variety of activities.

MAP #1: THE RED RIVER CORRIDOR
AN AGREEMENT FOR RECREATION AND CONSERVATION (ARC)



LEGEND

- 1 Trappist Monastery
- 2 Sale River Historic Theme Park
- 3 St. Norbert X-Kalay
- 4 Boat Bus System
- 5 St. Boniface Docks
- 6 The Forks
- 7 Alexander Docks
- 8 Point Douglas
- 9 Kildonan Park and St. John's Park Docks
- 10 Nisbit Hall, Kildonan Presbyterian Church Historic Site
- 11 River Road Parkway
- 12 St. Andrew's Church and Rectory
- 13 Lockport
- 14 Selkirk Waterfront
- 15 St. Peter's Church
- 16 Fort Maurepas
- 17 Netley Creek

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